

# A Best Practice Model for a Community Mobilization Team

Andrew Debicki, Regional Wraparound Coordinator  
Hamilton and Brantford, Ontario



A wraparound community mobilization team (hereafter referred to as a CMT) supports the work of wraparound teams and wraparound facilitators working with families in the local community.<sup>1</sup> This description is based on work developed by the innovators of community-based wraparound in Ontario, Canada starting in 2002.

As we started to develop wraparound initiatives that were driven and supported by local Community Mobilization Teams, we found that the concepts and description of the community team of the 1990s were insufficient to describe the rich community development and mobilization effort that was occurring in many communities across Ontario. The concept and description of a community resource team seemed to suit the evolving function of this entity. John VanDenBerg subsequently shared with us his use of the term community mobilization team and we found that this term best suited the structure and function of this community group and renamed it accordingly.

## Community Mobilization Team Overview

As described above, a CMT is a community-level entity intended to support wraparound implementation for individual teams and families. The CMT is made up of people

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1. A local community as referred to here is a group of people that live, play and potentially work in proximity to each other and care for each other. It may also be defined by culture, such as an Aboriginal community or reserve, a Polish community, or an Asian community.

who are “community connectors.” John McKnight, Professor of Education and Social Policy and Co-Director of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University, has identified the primary characteristics of good “community connectors” as follows:



1. They are gift centered in their nature.
2. They are well connected in their community.
3. They are trusted—this is important because they are asking people to help families with children and youth with complex needs who are often marginalized and have become isolated from positive social networks.
4. They believe that their community is a welcoming and supportive community.

Community connectors come from all walks of life. Frequently, they are community leaders, representatives from natural or informal community support entities (such as recreation, faith, business, or service clubs), or representatives of formal child and family services in the community. The important role they play is to help the families served through the local initiative to get connected to volunteer support people and in-kind resources they require to have their needs addressed on a daily basis.

The chair of a CMT is often a locally recognized community leader and/or champion for children and families. The CMT functions in a manner simi-

lar to but distinct from a steering or advisory committee or a board of directors. Lead agencies take care of all the programmatic and administrative aspects of the functioning of the CMT.

There are several main purposes of the CMT:

- To educate the local community about wraparound and the children, youth, and families who participate;
- To mobilize the community and its resources and volunteers to provide effective community support to each family with children and youth with complex needs involved in wraparound that live in that community; and
- To support the work of wraparound facilitators by connecting the children, youth, and families served to the in-kind resources and volunteers they require to meet their needs on a daily basis

Here are a few examples of how effective community supports may be facilitated by a CMT:

1. *A young mother in her late teens with two children got her life back together with the help of wraparound. She had bounced from foster home to foster home and then group home to group home from ages 4 to 16 when she left her last group home. All together, she had been in 23 different placements. She believed that parenting was instinct as she had not experienced a positive parenting experience herself. As a young mother of two children she was an open case to child welfare because they were concerned about her low level of parenting skills. When she had completed a very successful year in wraparound that saw child welfare close her file, she was asked what about wraparound had made the biggest difference. To her, it was the volunteer mentor who helped her develop her parenting skills. The mentor was recruited for her early in her wraparound process by the CMT.*
2. *A man and a woman with three children had been on disability for the last 12 years. Upon doing the strengths discovery,*

*the wraparound facilitator identified that the father had grown up in a family and town where it was important for him to learn to fix his own car. The father had only worked in food services at minimum wage before being put on disability. With the help of the local CMT, the father was sponsored to get his mechanics certificate. A person on the CMT used their connections at a local garage to get them to give the father a shot at being an apprentice. Not only did he complete his apprenticeship, but he was also hired on as a mechanic by the garage once he was finished his apprenticeship.*

3. *A teenage boy of 14 just about to be released from secure custody was referred to wraparound. Upon meeting him, his wraparound facilitator discovered that despite exhibiting extreme acting-out behavior in the custody facility, he was enthusiastic about all outdoor sports and some indoor sports and could quote stats for the last five years about sports such as hockey, biking, and skiing. With the help of the local CMT, he was placed for his court-ordered restitution at an outdoor sporting goods store that a CMT member frequented. Initially, the manager of the store requested a one-to-one worker to be with the 14-year-old all the time. Within a week, the manager phoned the probation officer and said that the one-to-one worker was not needed. He said that the youth's passion for outdoor sports was such that he had switched the young man from doing odd jobs to selling sports equipment. The manager predicted that he would be a great salesman for him.*

### A Vision and Mission for Developing CMTs

**Our vision** is a vibrant network of localized community mobilization teams, linked together across the country, providing effective community support for local families with children, youth, or adults with multiple, complex problems involved in wraparound.

**Our mission** is to continue to develop and

launch a number of localized CMTs across Canada over the coming years. Each of these CMTs will mobilize their local community by securing the necessary financial and in-kind resources and support so that families with children, youth, or adults with complex needs involved with wraparound can receive effective community support.

### Engaging Potential Members of a CMT

People we approach to be on the CMT often ask us how this community group we are asking them to join (and possibly lead) helps children, youth and adults and their families dealing with complex needs, and how wraparound is different from other services. To answer these questions, we first try to explain wraparound in a community-friendly way, providing an example of how it works.

For example, a referred family with children, youth or adults with complex needs is assigned a wraparound facilitator whose role is to work in partnership with the family to help them pull together their wraparound team. This team will be made up of the family themselves, their friends, community support people, and the service providers involved with the family that they find helpful. This is the family's team. They decide who will be on their team. The facilitator works with the family to help them identify their strengths, their culture and their priority needs. The facilitator and the family then bring together the family's wraparound team and together they review the strengths, culture and needs with the team and get them to add to each.

The facilitator then helps the family and their team to work through a highly structured, intense planning process. The product of this planning is the development of a comprehensive plan that addresses the top one or two needs that the family has chosen. This is accomplished by the facilitator helping the team brainstorm strategies that build on the strengths of the family, their team, and the community in which they live. The family then chooses the strategies that they think will work best. In essence, this team "wraps" services and supports around the family, based on their description of what is needed and what might work.

The potential CMT member is told that their

role will be to participate on a team that mobilizes the community to acquire necessary resources for participating families and teams. Such needs are communicated (in a non identifying way to the family) to the members of the local CMT through formal and informal channels. Resources may include volunteer and/or in-kind donations that are beyond the resources of the family and their team.

***What makes wraparound so different?*** In response to questions about how wraparound is different from other service models, we typically present these four examples:

1. The family's wraparound team brings together the family's friends and relatives, community support people and the service providers that the family finds helpful. The wraparound planning process integrates all of their efforts to help create a single plan for the family, focusing on one or two priorities identified by the family. While safety issues are non-negotiable, families usually identify safety issues as their top priority.
2. Part of the role of the wraparound facilitator is to teach the youth and family to build their capacity to do this kind of planning for themselves wherever possible. Many families graduate from the wraparound process and are able to carry on their own wraparound planning.
3. The CMT is able to help find the in-kind resources and volunteers that the family and their wraparound team need, but are not able to immediately obtain.
4. The family's wraparound team and the local community mobilization team are connected to help the family rebuild its safety net, develop connections to positive social networks, and develop positive relationships over time with people in their local community.

Youth and parents who have been involved with the wraparound process talk about wraparound as being different and providing them with real hope that life could be better on a daily basis.

### The Structure and Functioning of a Community Mobilization Team

John McKnight strongly recommended to us that the relationship or partnership between child and family services and our CMTs be structured such that the child and family service providers *support* local community leaders and citizens in that community to be in charge of the CMT.

All members of the CMT sign a partnership agreement that clearly outlines the role and functioning of a CMT and what is expected of each member. Agreements signed by sponsoring agencies also address due diligence issues, such as volunteer clearance and supervision and liability insurance.

***So, is the structure and functioning of a CMT like a board of directors, an advisory or steering committee, or a community service club?*** A CMT functions a little like each one of these types of entities. Like a board of directors, it oversees the acquisition and use of in-kind resources and volunteers. The CMT also has an executive like a board of directors, though typically not with staff *per se*. A CMT also functions a little like an advisory or steering committee in that it provides feedback to the local wraparound initiative. However, the members of the CMT have actual duties linked to the functions of a CMT described in the preceding section.

Finally, a CMT functions like a community service club in that it attracts people to a group that strongly believes in the power of the local community to do good things for those in need in their community. However, while similar, the focus on mobilizing the community into a state of readiness or preparedness to help address the individual needs of families with children, youth or adults with multiple, complex problems involved in wraparound is more like a board of directors.

### Expectations for Members of a Community Mobilization Team

1. Members are passionate about helping families with children, youth and adults in their community, especially when their needs are complex and hard to address.
2. Members are oriented to and willing to support what wraparound is and how it

helps families with children, youth and adults with complex needs have a better life. They are also asked to commit to the vision and mission described above.

3. Members are oriented to and willing to support what a CMT is and how it helps, as well as committed to work in accordance with the personal values and the community principles that underpin how wraparound is provided to people and families in need in the local community.
4. Members are asked to give what they can in the way of their own gifts, strengths and resources to support the function of the CMT and the people and families in wraparound that live in that local community.
5. Members are asked to act as “community connectors” to other individuals and social networks that have in kind resources and volunteers that could potentially help or be needed by people and families involved in wraparound that live in that local community.

We suggest to people that minimally it will involve one 2-3 hour meeting per month. They also will be asked to use their “connections” to help find in kind resources and potential volunteers, which they should be able to do in the course of their regular activities through the week. In addition, members may choose to get more involved and join a particular subcommittee (e.g. public education or fundraising) which would add another two hours to what they do in a month for about five hours at most. Or, they may choose to run for a position on the Executive next time there is an opening, which would potentially add another two hours monthly.

### The Structure of a CMT

As shown in Figure 1 (see page 6), the CMT is conceived as supporting individual families and their wraparound teams. This support is provided in partnership with sponsoring agencies who implement wraparound. These agencies also provide administrative support to the CMT. Below we provide a description of the key roles in the functioning of a CMT.

**Executive Team.** Each CMT has an executive team as well as a chair or multiple co-chairs

who direct the executive team and provide leadership and management of a local CMT. The executive team administers the CMT partnership agreement with both the membership of the CMT and with the sponsoring agencies that provide administrative support for the CMT and provide wraparound facilitators to work with families. An executive team may also have subcommittees such as public relations, fundraising and membership recruitment for the CMT. The executive team takes a lead role in community mobilization of in kind resources and volunteers (e.g. drivers, tutors, coaches, mentors, etc.)

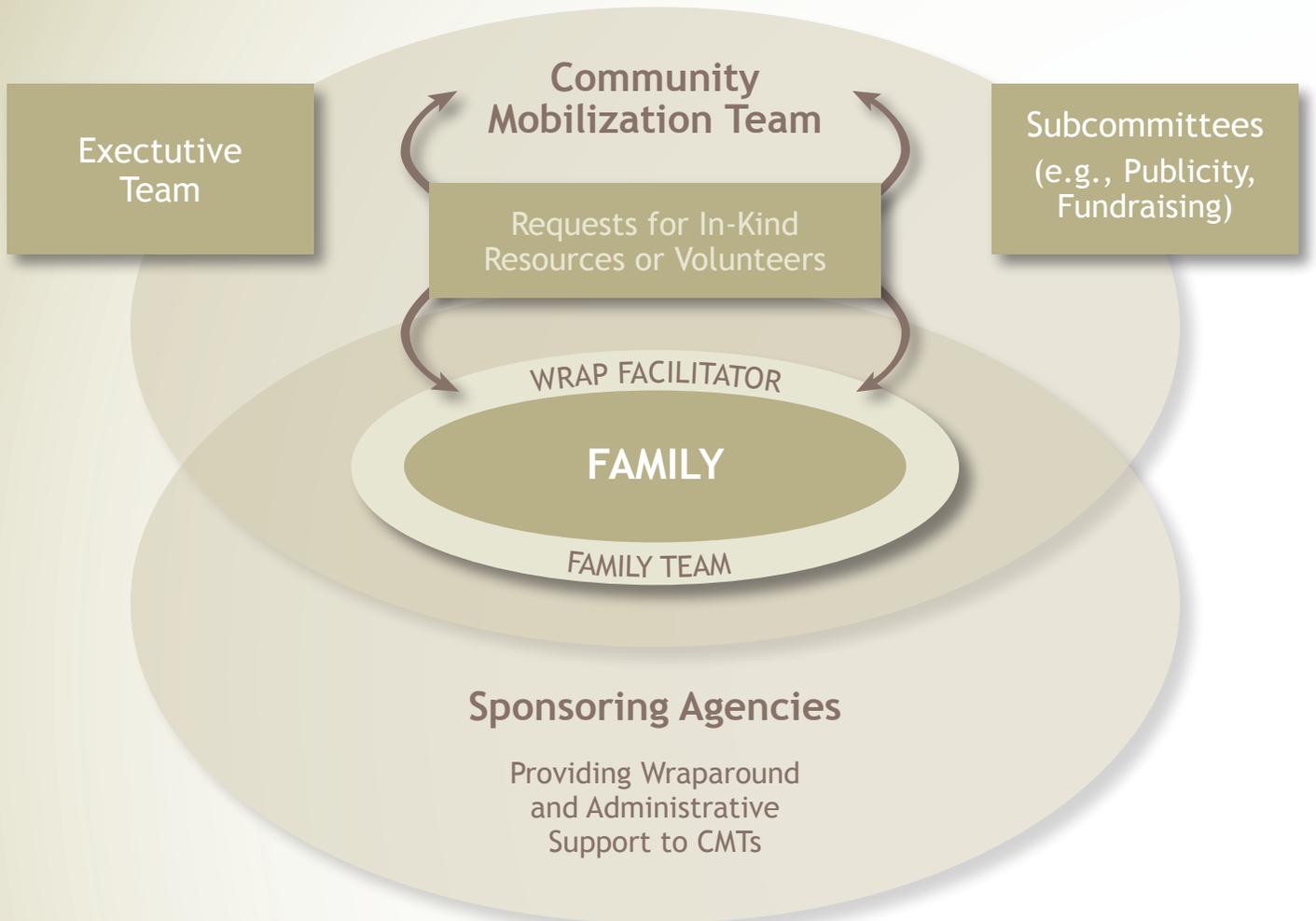
**Chair or Co Chairs of the CMT.** As described above, ideally the CMT chair or co-chairs are people who are already viewed as community champions. The chair(s) are critical to success of the CMT and the wraparound initiative. The chair(s) work with the support of the sponsoring agencies to ensure that all people, including those on the CMT and others involved with the local wraparound initiative, work together to ensure the smooth functioning of the initiative.

**Wraparound Teams.** As described in more detail above and in this *Resource Guide*, wraparound teams consist of people supporting individual families with whom wraparound is being implemented. A facilitator helps the family to identify potential team members and then uses the following guidelines to select the people to be on their team:

- Is the person willing to help?
- Does the family generally trust their advice?

*Youth and parents who have been involved with the wraparound process talk about wraparound as being different and providing them with real hope that life could be better on a daily basis.*

Figure 1. The Role of a Community Mobilization Team in Supporting Wraparound Implementation



- Is the person generally a positive influence with the family?
- Will the person keep the family’s business private and confidential?

**Sponsoring Agencies.** In addition to overseeing implementation of wraparound and supervision of staff such as the wraparound facilitators, sponsoring agencies support local CMTs by taking care of programmatic and legal functions, financial administration (hold and audit raised funds), and risk management (volunteer screening, liability insurance). They also provide meeting and

office space, and provide charitable receipts as necessary.

### Typical Agenda Items and Related Discussion for a Meeting of the CMT

**Logistics.** The meeting of the CMT is held at a time that is convenient for all members of the CMT. Supper meetings or meetings from 7-9 pm are popular times, as are lunchtime meetings. The location of the meeting is meant to be welcoming. Typically it might be held at the chair’s house or some other place such as a local restaurant or meeting room that is warm and inviting. The chair

acts as host welcoming people and engaging them in conversation and easing them into the meeting. The chair always make sure that everybody knows each other or gets to know each other. This part of the meeting may take up to 10 or 15 minutes or until the chair decides that everybody is comfortable.

**Celebrating Success.** Typically the chair eases the group into the meeting by describing themselves or getting the appropriate members to talk about key areas of success since the last meeting. This is a time to celebrate and thank people for their efforts. Often this will include the announcement of the successful result of a search for a key in kind resource or volunteer needed for a family in wraparound. It is important that non identifying information about the family be used to also talk about how the receipt of the resource or the help of a volunteer is making a difference in the lives of the family in wraparound. Sometimes a facilitator attends to share success that the family has achieved, especially with respect to the resources and volunteers found by the CMT.

**Requests for Support.** The chair then moves the meeting into reviewing the requests for needed resources and volunteers by families involved in wraparound. Again, care is taken to keep the identity of the family confidential. If members think that they can address the request themselves, then no further planning is required. However, if the request is beyond the resources immediately available to the members of the CMT, brainstorming a “fan out” strategy among everybody’s “community connections” may be called for. Once the ideas are all out on the table, the top two or three are chosen. Action plans are then developed and people volunteer to follow up on them so as to acquire the necessary resource or volunteer.

It is important that the chair try to ensure that everybody gets involved in both the brainstorming as well as the development of action plans. If a member goes to meeting after meeting without getting or being involved in the work of the CMT, they often drop out of the CMT. In this respect we have found that members who join the CMT want to do things, not just talk about it. Members of the CMT say that they stay involved because they feel that their gifts and strengths are being valued and used.

**Planning Educational and Fundraising Events.** The chair then asks people in charge of educational and fundraising events to review where the planning is at, again trying to invite others to get involved as they choose.

**Closing and Setting the Next Meeting.** The chair then wraps up the meeting, summarizing any key points that should be repeated before people leave, and ensuring that everybody is aware of the date and location of the next meeting. Usually there is a social period at the end of the meeting for those that don’t need to rush off to other obligations.

## References

McKnight, J. (2007). *Lectures on Asset-Based Community Development*, St. Catharines & Hamilton: Ontario, Canada.

## Author

**Andrew Debicki**, B.A., B.S.W., M.S.W., is the regional wraparound coordinator for Hamilton and Brantford, Ontario. He has been doing wraparound since 1993. Andrew is the co-chair of the Wraparound Association of Ontario and is working with Wrap Canada to lead the development of wraparound across the country. He is also an external partner with Vroon VanDenBerg, LLP. Since 1996 he has trained across Canada and more recently in Norway.

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